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GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT

Relationship between disarmament and development

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Following the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development held in New York from 24 August to 11 September 1987, the General Assembly, in its resolution 42/45 of 30 November 1987, requested the Secretary-General to take action through the appropriate organs, within available resources, for the implementation of the action programme adopted at the Conference.

2. In pursuance of paragraph 35 (ix) b of the Final Document of the Conference, 1/ the Secretary-General established, in December 1987, a high-level intra-Secretariat task force having the following composition: the Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation, Chairman; the Under-Secretary-General, Department of International Economic and Social Affairs; the Under-Secretary-General, Department of Public Information; the Assistant Secretary-General, Office for Research and the Collection of Information; and the Under-Secretary-General, Department for Disarmament Affairs, convener. The composition of the task force will need to be reviewed in the light of the recent organizational changes in the Secretariat.

3. The Secretary-General reported to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session, inter alia, on the specific activities carried out by the task force (see A/46/527). The Assembly, in its resolution 46/36 C of 6 December 1991, welcomed the report of the Secretary-General and requested him to continue to take action, through appropriate organs and within available resources, for the implementation of the action programme adopted at the Conference and to report to it at its forty-seventh session.

II. SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

4. In accordance with the priorities established by the task force for the period 1990-1993 (see A/45/592 and A/46/527), the specific activities described below were undertaken under severe resource constraints.

5. The Office for Disarmament Affairs participated in the Conference on International Cooperation in Peaceful Use of Military Industrial Technology, which was convened, in cooperation with the China Association for Peaceful Use of Military Industrial Technology and the Centre for Science and Technology for Development of the United Nations Secretariat, in Beijing from 22 to 26 October 1991. The Conference was attended by many participants from over 30 countries.

6. At that Conference it was pointed out that as more countries began to deal with the actual process of conversion, technical issues were being raised and some parts of the United Nations system, including the International Labour Organisation and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), were dealing with specific aspects of the problem. A number of

participants emphasized that the United Nations role in promoting the exchange of national experiences was desirable, but not sufficient by itself to facilitate the transition from a military to a civilian economy. Several participants sought a more active role for the United Nations.

7. The Conference did not adopt any declaration. Nevertheless, some of the views expressed during the discussion are set out below:

(a) Faced with a shrinking global military industrial sector, conversion to civilian production was only one among many possible courses of action that major military producers might take. Market economies, in particular, had resorted to the closure of plants as part of the conglomeration of several manufacturing units, to exports, or to a combination of these measures, with some trying to enter the disarmament industry through development of verification techniques or weapons disposal processes;

(b) National policies of converting from military to civilian production did not, by themselves, guarantee that programmes of military modernization would not be pursued;

(c) For countries that were actually converting, the process had involved more than technical re-engineering. Cost-effectiveness, economies of scale, import dependence and the time factor were important considerations for a successful conversion project;

(d) National attempts at conversion were difficult to sustain in isolation from other important features of the world economy, such as access to global markets and transfer of technology.

8. An International Conference on Conversion: Opportunities for Development and Environment, jointly organized by the Centre for Science and Technology for Development of the United Nations Secretariat, the German Ministry of Higher Education and Research, the State of North Rhine Westphalia and the Institute of Environmental Protection Policy of the University of Dortmund, Germany, was held at Dortmund from 24 to 27 February 1992. The Conference attracted the participation of over 200 senior political leaders, industrialists, scientists and technologists from 35 countries, and representatives of the United Nations organizations and specialized agencies that are currently engaged in exploring practical measures for promoting the conversion of military facilities and capabilities for sustainable human benefits.

9. The deliberations at the Conference reflected the growing awareness of possible environmental benefits of conversion at the highest levels of Government and industrial and research establishments.

10. During the discussion in plenary and working group meetings, and in written presentations, a number of concrete proposals emerged for enhancing the prospects of implementing conversion schemes. These are in the nature of actions that can be taken at the international and national levels. The

proposals fall mainly under the categories of a set of studies, information exchange and clearing-house systems, major publications, follow-up conferences on specific issues, a variety of technological conversion schemes and innovative institutional designs.

11. The Office for Disarmament Affairs participated in a one-day workshop on linking financial flows to military expenditures: development-enhancing or unwarranted interference, organized by the Overseas Development Council in Washington, D.C., on 28 January 1992.

12. The workshop brought together experts from some major donor countries, representatives of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the United Nations and scholars from countries receiving developmental assistance to discuss a position paper prepared by the Overseas Development Council which dealt with the major developments leading to the current debate on making reductions in military spending a condition for receiving developmental assistance.

13. It was noted that, ever since its introduction two years ago, this has been a controversial subject, since objections to the linkage between arms reduction and developmental objectives have been raised not only by the recipients of aid but also, as was evident at the workshop, by some bilateral donors.

14. Officials from development aid programmes pointed out that reduction in military spending by the recipients was one among several considerations governing aid policies. They stated that while developmental assistance policies favoured a linkage with military spending reduction, withholding such assistance on the grounds of excessive military expenditure was a decision that in most donor countries was governed by other political considerations.

15. It was pointed out that development aid agencies had neither the requisite information nor the expertise to assess the appropriate level of military spending among the developing countries. For the present, those agencies were more concerned about pointing out the opportunity cost of public expenditures and emphasizing the desirability of efficient management of national resources. Although available data had indicated no direct linkage between lower levels of military spending and higher performance in the observance of human rights, environmental protection and democratic institution-building among the developing countries, it was suggested that donor countries could be encouraged to explore the possibility of putting together aid packages for a small group of recipients in "hard to decline" deals encouraging lower levels of military spending.

16. There was a generally shared feeling that in view of the highly political nature of issues related to national security, including military expenditures, the United Nations was an appropriate forum for promoting military restraint and for dealing with the practical problems arising from information related to arms reductions. In this respect, a brief summary of recent developments at the United Nations in this field was provided.

17. An international conference is to be organized, in collaboration with the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the Outer Space Affairs Division of the Department of Political Affairs, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNIDO and other interested United Nations entities, by the Science, Technology, Environment and Resources Division of the Department of Economic and Social Development, together with the Government of the Russian Federation, in Moscow, from 12 to 16 October 1992. This conference will be based on contributions from experts in the areas of conversion and disarmament, science and technology policies, technology assessment of aerospace technologies and development financing, as well as on the results of the conferences on conversion held in Beijing in October 1991 and at Dortmund in February 1992.

18. The Department of Public Information has continued to carry out its public information activities concerning disarmament and development, including their relationship. A television programme entitled "Arms for arms" was produced by the Department in June 1991 for the weekly series UN in Action. The programme was based on the decision of the United Nations that the scrapped arms could be utilized to serve the process of peace and reconstruction. Ten tons of metal were donated to the World Rehabilitation Clinic in Honduras, to be turned into artificial limbs for the region's war disabled. The donation has enabled the Rehabilitation Fund to cut manufacturing costs for otherwise very expensive prostheses. It has also reduced production time, since parts of the guns can be taken out and used immediately.

19. This issue was also touched upon in a number of Department of Public Information documentary programmes, broadcast magazine segments and news items, such as: "Indonesia applies nuclear techniques to economic development" (Puntos cardinales, June 1991); "Using military resources to protect the environment" (Scope, January 1992); "Nuclear disarmament and management of the environment in Africa" (Perspectives internationales, May 1992); "Disarmament and the new world order" (Puntos cardinales, May 1992); and "Disarmament and development" (Naciones Unidas en accion, May 1992).

Notes

1/ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.87.IX.8.